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ABSTRACT

The account of language use in Accra, capital of Ghana, focuses on the social history of language use and on issues of language choice in a multilingual society. The first chapter gives an account of a language dispute that demonstrates both literally and symbolically the historically rooted relationships of the four main languages of Accra: Ga, the Kwa language of its traditional community; Akan, another Kwa language spoken by the largest ethnic group in the country; Hausa, the Chadic language that dominates northern Nigeria; and English, the Germanic language of the former colonial power. Chapter 2 outlines the history and present state of urban multilingualism in West Africa and proposes a historical orientation for sociolingistic theory. Chapters 3, 4 describe the linguistic situation in Accra, based on questionnaire surveys. The next three chapters give historical background for the previous two, tracing development and consolidation of the Ga-speaking community, from sometime before the sixteenth century, examining the introduction and spread of the very different languages Akan and Hausa, and discussing the introduction and spread of Portuguese and then English. The final chapter redefines Accra as a field of communication, commenting on the relationship between its multilingual history and modern urban registers. Contains 357 references. (MSE)

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